

AMBIVALENCE OF SOCIAL STIGMATIZATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the article is to study the characteristics of the stigmatization process of modern youth in the Russian Far East. Special attention is paid to living conditions in the Russian Far East, noting that the majority of the population in the Far Eastern region and, above all, young people, are in a situation of social inequality and marginality in relation to the rest of Russians. Many young people associate their life strategies with leaving the territory of the Far East of Russia.

Methodology: At the first stage of the study, the method of participant observation was used, which provided primary information about the impact of stigma on the self-identification of young people. At the empirical level of research, such sociological methods as document analysis, sociological surveys in the form of questioning and interviewing were applied. A sociological survey was conducted as a pilot study of the problems of stigmatization among high school and university students of the cities of Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk-on-Amur.

Main findings of this article: Stigma is manifested in its own way in different times and in different communities, it is historically and socioculturally specific. Territorial stigma possesses signs of ambivalence, on the one hand, it has a negative effect on the socialization and self-identification process of young people in the Russian Far East, but on the other hand, it can act as an incentive for young people to make an active and conscious choice of their life strategy.

Applications of this study: The findings can be used in the implementation of youth policy in the Far Eastern Federal District by state and local authorities in order to prevent the outflow of young people from the region. The main results of the study can be useful for use in the educational process in such disciplines as sociology, political science, regional studies, as well as for the further study of the problems of social stigmatization.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The novelty and significance of the study lie in the fact that in Russian sociology practically no attention is paid to the problems of territorial stigmatization. The theoretical conclusions were obtained on the basis of the original sociological research conducted by the authors of the article in the cities of the Far Eastern region of Russia. The results provided new knowledge of both territorial stigmatization and social stigmatization in general. The novelty of the conducted study lies in the actualization of the problem of social stigmatization of Russian youth living in the Far Eastern region remote from the center of Russia.

Keywords: social stigmatization, youth, Russian Far East, sociological survey.

INTRODUCTION

The present study has revealed the ambivalence of social stigmatization of youth in the Russian Far East region, namely that life on the periphery of the country negatively “labels” young people and thereby encourages them to make an active and conscious choice of their life strategy. Research interest in the problems of stigmatization throughout the entire existence of scientific knowledge was constantly actualized during the periods when the world community faced a serious issue of the nature and causes of deviating forms of behavior, factors stimulating discrimination, social exclusion of the individual from society.

Modern researchers have traditionally understood the process of stigmatization as “labeling” and “branding”. Besides, it is noted that stigma can often be randomly combined with such characteristics of an individual as, for example, skin color, manner of speaking, visible injury, etc. That is, stigmatization is not always determined by the behavior or a specific individual act. (Lipay T. P., Mamedov A. K. 2008). Stigma is manifested in its own way in different times and in different communities, it is historically and socioculturally specific. We have previously referred to the study of the process of social stigmatization and its nature (Turkulets S. E., Turkuletc A. V., Listopadova E. V., Slesarev A. V. 2011) analyzing stigmatization as a factor negatively affecting the process of socialization and social identification of individuals.

This article attempts to analyze the stigmatization of modern youth in the Russian Far East. First of all, it will address territorial stigmatization. The hypothesis of our study is the idea that territorial stigma possesses signs of ambivalence, on the one hand, it has a negative effect on the socialization process of young people in the Russian Far East, but on the other hand, it can act as an incentive for young people to make an active and conscious choice of their life strategy. Territorial stigmatization in the context of this work refers to the process of “marking” and “self-marking” of an individual as living

in a particular area (in the “outback”, on the periphery, in a marginalized area) and (based on established stereotypes) in this sense limited to the rights to full life and implementation of their life strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, the concept and specific nature of stigmatization quite often becomes the subject of study of scientists from different countries. Psychologists and doctors are especially active in the research of various stigmas. A substantial amount of current research is focused on the determinants of the stigma of “mental illness”. ([Everett B. G., Hatzenbuehler M. L., Hughes T. L. 2016](#); [Mooney S. J., El-Sayed A. M. 2016](#); [Tuntiya N. 2016](#); [Moses T. 2014](#); [Subica A. M., Aitaoto N., Sullivan J. G., Henwood B. F., Yamada A. M., Link B. G. 2019](#); [Durna Gulshah, Yorulmaz Orcun, Aktac Ayca 2019](#)) Diseases of various kinds often cause the desire of ordinary people to stigmatize and reject an individual. ([Whittle H. J., Palar K., Ranadive N. A., Turan J. M., Kushel M., Weiser S. D. 2017](#); [Kayama M., Haight W. 2018](#)) A common reason for labeling is a non-standard appearance (obesity, physical injury). ([Sikorski C., Luppa M., Angermeyer M. C., Schomerus G., Link B., Riedel-Heller S. G. 2015](#); [Mooney S. J., El-Sayed A. M. 2016](#))

Scientists are paying particular attention to the stigmatization of drug addicts. This criterion of stigmatization is very widespread nowadays. ([Birtel M. D., Wood L., Kempa N. J. 2017](#); [Paquette C. E., Syvertsen J. L., Pollini R. A. 2018](#)) However, each of the above and many other criteria suggests a very narrow range of research. In this work, we are primarily interested in territorial stigmatization, since it, in turn, is capable of causing other criteria of stigmatization (for example, failing to meet the established stereotypes of a “successful person”) (Catherine J. Taylor ([Taylor C. J. 2014](#)) and others), as well as may provoke committing wrongful acts (drug addiction, criminal behavior), which leads to the next round of stigmatization. ([Baur J. E., Hall A. V., Daniels S. R., Buckley M. R., Anderson H. J. 2018](#)). In addition, this process has a very serious impact on the social identification of young people.

Russian sociologists who study stigmatization processes usually avoid the issues of territorial stigmatization. In recent years, only the works of A.Y. Kazakova has attracted the attention of the scientific community with their in-depth analysis of the place of residence as a stigma. ([Kazakova A.Y. 2017](#); [Kazakova A.Y. 2017](#)) The author examines territorial stigma in the context of the search for a cultural standard of life considered “normal” in different eras and societies, its fulfillment of functions of cultural heritage, integration and social regulation, and notes that it determines the attitude of people to housing located within stigmatized areas, affecting the territorial behavior of residents and becoming a factor in the formation of the physical space of the settlement. A.Y. Kazakova places particular emphasis on the fact that territorial stigmatization is not only negative. “Along with negative stigma, it is possible to identify a positive one, and along with segregation as a key mechanism for the formation of stigma, we can distinguish functional zoning of a settlement and social symbolism. The house and the surrounding area become a text telling about the social biography, status, and values of the owner, in other words, it is a marker of social identification, a measure of prestige”. ([Kazakova A.Y. 2017](#))

In contrast to Russian scientists, modern foreign researchers often consider the territory of residence as stigma (Loïc Wacquant, Tom Slater, Virgílio Borges Pereira ([Wacquant L., Slater T., B. Pereira V. 2014](#)) ; Sune Qvotrup Jensen, Ann-Dorte Christensen ([Jensen S. Q., Christensen A.-D. 2012](#)) ; Simone Antonia Luciavan de Wetering ([Simone Antonia Luciavan de Wetering 2017](#))).

Thus, Loïc Wacquant, Tom Slater, Virgílio Borges Pereira ([Wacquant L., Slater T., Pereira V. B. 2014](#)) show a dynamic interaction of various components of social environment: territorial administrative units, cultural symbolic group behavior models and everyday individual actions. Using numerous examples of European (e.g. Paris, Stockholm, Bristol, Edinburgh, Copenhagen) and American (e.g. New York, Chicago) urban areas, the authors reveal the close connection of three spatial structures in a single urban ontology: symbolic space, social space, and physical space. In the course of the conducted research, the authors identified such trends as the desire of people living in specific, dysfunctional, “godforsaken” areas “to close” from others, to retire, to hide their stigmatized identity. This is due to the close connection of territorial stigma with such factors as poverty, immorality, street crime, the ethnicity of migrants, and so on.

The authors argue that modern territorial stigmatization has the following characteristics: 1) a close link with the ethnicity of the participants in this process; 2) the society takes the phenomenon of territorial stigma for granted, as a particularly visible attribute of “social hell”; 3) stigmatized areas of modern post-industrial cities embody the vectors of social disintegration (loose living in general); 4) the hypertrophy of racial or religious characteristics of the inhabitants of these territories provokes the intensification of stigmatization processes; 5) stigmatized areas of a modern city cause negative reactions (emotions, opinions, assessments) of residents of the so-called normal areas, which, in turn, facilitates the philistine justification of the state taking stringent measures (rights restrictions, fines, penalties). Moreover, public services manipulate this image of marginal areas, instilled in the public consciousness, in order to promote their strategies in the development of territories (for example, demolition of entire neighborhoods or radical reconstruction of urban areas).

Here we see a direct social and political manipulation of this problem, instead of a thorough and in-depth study of the causes of its occurrence, conditions, and factors of its current reproduction, as well as the development of its prospective overcoming on such basis. Foreign researchers result in their study with the thesis that territorial stigmatization, as an anchor of social discrediting, plays a key role in the material, substantive, symbolic and cultural transformation of the modern urban landscape. In their opinion, territorial stigmatization is not a static state, a neutral process or a harmless cultural game, it acts

as a consistent and harmful form of action of a social community in relation to its members. Scientists point to the urgent need to take political actions to re-socialize people who have been subjected to territorial stigmatization.

Simone Antonia, Luciavan de Wetering ([Simone Antonia Luciavan de Wetering 2017](#)) explore the process of stigmatization by analyzing the life of young people in the suburb of Paris (Bondy). They emphasize that the basis for building a stigmatized personality of a young person is the internalization of the attributive identity. However, the process of transforming external social norms and forms of communication into stable inner qualities of the personality itself is often carried out indirectly rather than directly. One way of such indirect socialization is externalization acting as a mechanism for protecting one's own personal identity. In other words, from the authors' point of view, young people, objectively differentiated according to the territorial and administrative basis (place of residence), subjectively exclude the discourse of stigmatization and deviance from their own self-identification. Researchers believe that we should abandon simplified approaches to the characteristics of such contingent of young people and treat these groups of the population rather as "living together in diversity" and capable of sufficient dynamic development in the social structures.

Considering the specifics of the formation of urban marginal areas, Sune Qvotrup Jensen, Ann-Dorte Christensen note that the residents of these territories take their marginal status as a matter of course, without any critical reflection. Moreover, such uncritical self-determination only enhances the effect of territorial stigmatization. Residents of marginal areas are so accustomed to their stigmatized position that they actually seem to enjoy their status. The authors believe that state institutions and the development of the political culture of the whole society should play a certain role in overcoming this negative effect.

In our previously published papers ([Turkulets S. E., Turkuletc A. V., Listopadova E. V., Slesarev A. V. 2018](#); [Turkulets S., Turkuletc A., Listopadova E., Bazhenov R., Dimitrova S., Anikeeva N. 2018](#)), it was noted stigmatization is, in fact, a necessary condition and at the same time the result of the process of social identification. Regarding territorial stigma, it should be once again emphasized that, on the one hand, it has a negative effect on the process of socialization of young people in the Russian Far East, but on the other hand, it can act as an incentive for young people to make an active, conscious choice of their life strategy.

METHODOLOGY

At the first stage, the method of participant observation was used. It provided primary information about the impact of stigma on the self-identification of young people living in the Far East of Russia. During the collection of material, a statistical method such as the interviewing method and questionnaire was used. To analyze the data, we used a statistical method such as factor analysis, which allows us to draw appropriate conclusions based on a comprehensive and systematic study of the impact of factors on the value of effective indicators. At the empirical level of research, such sociological methods as document analysis, sociological surveys in the form of questioning and interviewing were applied. A sociological survey was conducted as a pilot study of the problems of stigmatization among high school and university students of the city of Khabarovsk. The total number of respondents is 145 people. A non-formalized interview was conducted with senior students in Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk-on-Amur. Since the collection of empirical data was carried out as part of a pilot study in two cities of the Russian Far East, the method of cluster random sampling was chosen as a method of forming a sample population. Given the significant territorial scope of the study, this method allowed us to provide the necessary level of representativeness of its results. The study is interdisciplinary in nature since it covers the fields of sociology, social psychology, philosophy, and political science.

ANALYSIS

Stigma based on the criterion of the territory of residence obviously has a special impact on the self-identification of young people. As a rule, young people who have not yet settled down in life, have not received a complete education, who want to "have it all", construct a certain ideal image of a prosperous life in the central part of Russia (Moscow, St. Petersburg). In their view, capital cities provide unlimited opportunities for self-realization. Living in a provincial, in fact peripheral, Far East region today is a factor not only limiting the life strategies for young people but also contributing to their negative self-identification.

The result of stigmatization is usually social labeling, the isolation of the individual from the community and his or her opposition to other members of the community, full or partial rejection of it. Sometimes it becomes a factor that predetermines the programming and self-programming of an individual's behavior on its basis. ([Lipay T. P., Mamedov A. K. 2011](#))

It should be noted that in the 21st century the Far East of Russia is in a very difficult socio-economic situation. The 20th century marked itself in relation to the development of the Far East as a century of creation and development, when hundreds of thousands of young people enthusiastically traveled to remote areas to build roads, cities, power stations, etc., graduates of central Russian universities were distributed to Far Eastern enterprises, educational institutions, and health care institutions, stayed there, getting free housing, decent wages, having the financial opportunity to travel outside the region freely using various benefits and privileges. But since the late 1990s, the situation began to change dramatically. Young people from the western and central territories of Russia almost stopped coming to the Far East in order to make a life, to

find fulfillment in the profession. The Far Eastern region is no longer attractive for young people, both for its infrastructure and forms of social support. Enterprises and institutions are not able to provide young professionals with free housing and decent wages. The quality of life in certain areas of the Far East is very poor, which contributes to the criminalization of the region and increases the risks of marginalization of young people. In addition, the problem of drug addiction among young people in the Far East is particularly acute; the region has the highest rate of drug addiction in Russia. This is due to the presence of its own drug material base in the form of large areas of cannabis growth, as well as the supply of synthetic drugs from China and opioid drugs from the countries of Central Asia.

Despite the fact that the state has begun to implement activities oriented towards the development of the Far East in recent years, the situation has not changed radically. Firstly, all state projects are aimed, as before, at obtaining economic benefits from the exploitation of the region's resources, secondly, state social policy is aimed primarily at attracting internal and external migrants to the Far East, and not at supporting those who live and work in this territory, the interests and motives of the inhabitants of the region are ignored by the official authorities.

The state is not taking appropriate measures to prevent the outflow of population from the Far East. For many years, this region has been of interest for the center of Russia solely as a natural resource base. Moreover, both with regard to natural resources, and in relation to human capital, which in the form of a potential mass of applicants can also become an important source of income (tuition fees in metropolitan universities and colleges, accommodation, etc.)? all this led to the fact that the majority of the population of the Far Eastern region and, above all, the youth, found themselves in a situation of social inequality and marginality in relation to the rest of the Russians.

According to statistics, for example, from 50,000 to 60,000 people leave the Khabarovsk Territory annually (data from 2012-2017). ([General data on migration of the population of the Khabarovsk Territory 2012-2017](#))

As a part of the project "The Negative Role of Stigmatization in the Socialization of Russian Youth (illustrated by the case of the Far Eastern Federal District), supported by the Russian Foundation of Basic Research, we developed a program of sociological research. It is planned to conduct surveys and interviews of young people in the cities of the Far Eastern region in accordance with the quota sampling. The questionnaire is designed so that, on the one hand, it is possible to find out the attitude of young people towards groups of people who are different from others, to determine which differences are most obviously and often condemned or rejected by society (stigmatization), and which, on the contrary, are accepted and even supported; and on the other hand, to try to establish the basis of self-stigmatization. The questions include various criteria for stigmatization (appearance, nationality, health status, etc.). One of the criteria for branding was a territorial stigma.

To clarify the characteristics of territorial stigmatization of the young population of the Russian Far East, a pilot study was conducted using questionnaires and informal interviews. 131 students of 2-4 courses from one of the universities of Khabarovsk took part in the survey; a non-formalized interview was conducted with 14 high school students (grades 10-11) of secondary schools in Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk-on-Amur. We selected only answers to questions concerning the attitude of Khabarovsk youth to their place of residence and the prospects for realizing their potential in the Russian Far East - questions 35, 36 and 37

The greatest interests for the study are the respondents' answers to the following questions: "Living in the Far East, do you think you can fulfill yourself here?", "Is it true that Russia is rich in outskirts?", "Do you consider it possible obtaining high-quality vocational education in the Far East?" In addition, the respondents were asked to describe a person from the "outback" according to such characteristics as appearance, speech, behavior, manner of communication, etc. The answers were distributed as follows:

Table 1. Question 35

Living in the Far East, do you think you can fulfill yourself here?	
Response	% of respondents
Yes	11,5
No	72,5
Not sure	16

The responses give some indication that young people do not believe in the potential of the Far Eastern region as a place where they could accomplish their purposes; make the most of their abilities. The overwhelming majority of respondents assess the development prospects of the Russian Far East negatively.

Table 2. Question 36.

Is it true that Russia is rich in outskirts?	
Response	% of respondents
Yes	21

No	49
Not sure	30

The statement presented in the question is of particular importance for the Far Eastern region, which is remote from the center of Russia since the latter is distinguished by both unique natural resources and human resources that have experience in living and working in harsh peripheral areas. The responses indicate that young people do not perceive the outskirts of Russia as a kind of good and do not see any particular attractiveness in life far from the central part of the country.

Table 3. Question 37.

Do you consider it possible obtaining high-quality vocational education in the Far East?	
Response	% of respondents
Sure	9
There are many universities but few specialties	20
The Far East is a province, opportunities are limited	52
An Absolutely no, a good education can only be obtained in central Russia or abroad	14
Not sure	5

Analysis of the answers to this question leads us to the completely logical conclusion that the majority of respondents do not see prospects for self-fulfillment in the Russian Far East.

The open-ended form of the question of the characterization of a "person from the outback" revealed some meaningful features formulated by the respondents. Thus, the overwhelming number of respondents, while listing the signs, indicated the *simplicity of speech, rural slang, obscene speech, simple clothing, lack of style of clothing, simple behavior*. The word "simple" was used most often to describe both the appearance of a provincial and his/her behavior and speech. It seems that this word allowed the respondents to stigmatize "a person from the outback" in such a way, without thinking deeply about the distinctive features.

In the course of non-formalized interviews, senior students from Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk-on-Amur were asked similar questions. The responses can be distributed as follows: the majority of respondents noted that they would gladly leave the Far East, but referred to the impossibility of deciding their fate for themselves without taking into account the opinions of the parents due to complete material dependence on the latter; some argued that it is in principle possible to get the first professional education in this region, but then it is still better to leave to continue your education (Master's degree, second higher education, advanced training), and then find a job in the central part of Russia or abroad. Only one respondent said in an interview that he would like to stay in the Far East, and plans to study and work in the future here. In relation to the "person from the outback", such characteristics as "rural", "rustic", "rude", "aggressive", "modest", "poor", "foul language" were most often used. It is noteworthy that schoolchildren from Khabarovsk focused on the characteristics of the provincial associated with his place of residence (rural, rustic) and his appearance (poor, simple), the Komsomolsk-on-Amur residents also paid attention to the behavior and speech. The stigma of residence in the responses of schoolchildren made it possible in general to conclude they implicitly exclude the possibility of living in the outback, do not see the prospects for personal development and the fulfillment of life plans outside major regional centers.

Based on the theory of the "deviant career" of supporters of symbolic interactionism, the interpretation of the results of the pilot study makes it possible to note the following. The process of positive re-socialization is not a mirror copy of a "deviant career." Effective re-socialization is only possible when an individual independently begins or at least tries to model new behavioral traits meeting generally accepted social standards, consistently and actively embodies them in the behavioral acts.

Unlike other criteria of stigmatization (drug addiction, injuries, mental disorders, and other illnesses, different sexual orientation, etc.) stigma of residence contribute to the desire to hide their stigmatized identity in a much more subtle way. Awareness of the possibility of overcoming territorial stigma by accomplishing their life strategies outside this territory encourages individuals to take appropriate actions.

Thus, it can be noted that the hypothesis of the dual nature of territorial stigmatization, which, on the one hand, negatively affects the socialization of young people in the Russian Far East, but on the other hand, can act as an incentive for young people to make an active, conscious choice of their life strategy, is confirmed.

CONCLUSION

1. As a result of the study, we consider it possible to identify the objective and subjective factors determining the processes of territorial stigmatization and self-stigmatization of young people in the Russian Far East. The

subjective factors are the following: young people idealizing life in central Russia; young people's superficial knowledge of the history, geography, traditions of Russia and their native land; lack of patriotism/affection towards the native land; often unreasonably high self-esteem. Objective factors of stigmatization and self-stigmatization of young people living in the Far East include: the remoteness of the Far Eastern region from the center of Russia and the difficulty in free movement, both in Russia and in Europe; declarative nature of the state's concern for the inhabitants of the Far Eastern region; limited range of training and specialties offered by the Far Eastern educational institutions for young people; poor development of the entertainment industry for young people.

2. Unlike the other criteria of stigmatization (drug addiction, injuries, mental and other diseases, different sexual orientations, etc.), the stigma of residence contributes to the desire to hide their stigmatized identity in a much more subtle way. Awareness of the possibility of overcoming territorial stigma by accomplishing their life strategies outside this territory encourages individuals to take appropriate actions.

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